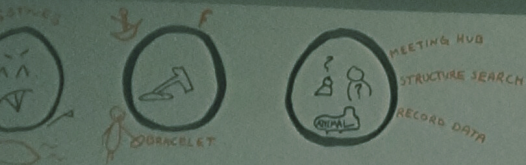


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IMAGINE

THE DESIGN THING MAGAZINE



FEATURED EVENT

URGENCY in NON-URGENCY



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Why talk about crisis?

On December 11th, 2019, Co-Design students at Malmö University gathered at the innovation hub Storm, to set the stage for their yearly Design Thing during which everyone participates in each others' Thing and other participants are welcomed to join in. This approach to design is grounded on participation and democracy and the groups gather around a controversial issue. The Design Thing Magazine had the opportunity to participate in this innovative approach and even meet one of the groups to gain insights on their pressing climate issue and hear their side of the Design Thing Story.

The “paradise” group, as they call themselves, spent the previous term exploring a participatory design approach to the topic of paradise communities that form in the face of crisis. As one of the group members, Hjalmar Wallin, explains:

- Since we worked on the topic of a Paradise Built in Hell, our scope was in the realm of crisis. For the Design Thing, we decided to work on the issue of non-urgency, since that was what we thought was the most intriguing dilemma when it comes to crisis, and especially crisis preparedness.

- More specifically, the group were interested in the different ways we solution for crisis whether that be in a reactionary or preemptive way, explains Hershel Nashman.

- This issue is especially relevant to the topic of climate change that surrounds us all, Alison Thomas continues. However, those people not directly affected by a sudden crisis, such as flooding or wildfires, don't necessarily experience the urgency involved even if a similar crisis can happen close to them and have life-threatening consequences.

When asked how they ended up working with this particular issue, the group explained that this idea of urgency seemed to manifest itself from the beginning of the project where they wondered how to create a “paradise” without a crisis necessarily happening.

Mina Legnered reflects on her immediate thoughts:

- It should be possible to create a sort of “desire line” for other communities to replicate the compassion, kindness and other positive ways a crisis-affected community acts.

- We found through our term project that people had quite different opinions of when and why we should prepare for crisis. The people we spoke to ranged from doomsday preppers to people who saw no immediate threat. The gradual warming of the Earth e.g. can be viewed as a crisis that does not necessarily evoke urgency in all inhabitants of the planet while sudden climate crises such as flooding, hurricanes or wildfires are in their nature very sudden and urgent to those immediately affected by them. Amongst others, there is the problem of conveying and experiencing urgency in order to motivate people around the world to act on a crisis that is not immediate to them.

When is it time to start to prepare for what is coming, or is it too late?

Hershel agreeingly explains:

- Today more than ever, people are aware of the inevitability of crisis as a result of climate change. These crises directly impact many people, and are observed by most of the world. Today, the world watches as forest fires sweep across Australia devastating everything in their path. I think looking at the idea of urgency when it comes to crisis is an incredibly pressing issue. How do we use the devastation of crisis in one area today to create change in another place? When is it time to start to prepare for what is coming, or is it too late? Who is responsible to address these crises? I think as the people, these are the questions that need to be pondered.

- As I see it, Hjalmar cuts in, there were primarily two aspects that made us want to work with non-urgency: Firstly, the paradise feeling people seem to experience in crisis, but not in everyday life.

Questions like those that Mina mentioned, on how we could enable a sense of paradise in non-urgent situations arose. And secondly, the realisation that in an urgent scenario people who are affected can't hide - they have to deal with it. With non-urgent situations it's different, because although people have knowledge that crisis occurs, as we speak, in a lot of places around the world, this seems to have little effect on a lot of people's preparedness. So the question how we can make people realize they have to be better prepared arose, and therefore we had to deal with non-urgency behaviour.

Let participants experience the impact of an urgent crisis

The group explained that during their research, they stumbled upon several inspiring concepts from around the world. One of them being the ‘pay-it-forward’-network that formed during the 2011 earthquake in Japan in order to motivate survivors of earlier disasters to pay the help they received forward to those affected by the current earthquake. As the survivors had similar experiences of the urgency that an immediate crisis entails, the motivation to help was probably already there. But how then can urgency be conveyed to people who have not experienced an immediate crisis?

One possible answer lies in the approach that the group pursued, making use of methods of visualisation and imagination in order to create tangibility and in turn urgency in the face of non-urgent behaviour of people not directly affected by the crisis. This in its turn would enable people anywhere in the world to interpret the actual state of things and employ both those affected by the crisis and those elsewhere in the world who might be affected by future climate crises in the solutioning process by making the state of things shareable and interpretable.

The aim of the group was to let participants experience the impact of an urgent crisis, in order to illustrate a future scenario that would evoke preemptive thinking in the participants.



“

The Execution of the Design Thing

Alarming lights, sound of thunder and heavy rain, and a topic we all should be concerned with - the annual Design Thing by the CoDesign students of Malmö University wanted us to get into the realm of non-urgency. Did they manage to do so?





It is a rainy Wednesday in Malmö, with the wind being abnormally calm. Almost as calm as the everyday life that is taking part in the northern parts of the city. We are a group of people, from different backgrounds, about to take part of the CoDesign students of Malmö University's annual Design Thing at Storm. When going into Storm I look forward to taking off my raincoat, drinking the chai tea I can sense the smell of and getting to that mental state of focused coziness.

When the second group of the day is entering the stage and starting their Thing, all of us participants are getting to choose an empty, uniquely designed box of matches. We are asked to metaphorically put our loved ones into it and manifest this by writing on the inside of the box the name of our loved one.

The boxes are collected and facilitator Hershel Nashman is letting us know that we are now all citizens of Venice, and the coziness inside me is thriving. A video with footage of the beautiful city is spreading out on the wall in front of us, combined with audio of the iconic Italian artist Eros Ramazzotti - you can almost sense the freshly brewed espresso made by hands that sometimes can express more than a sounding language.

Though, all of a sudden the mood quickly takes a one eighty degree turn away from the sunny existence we're tricked into, and an alarming lighting and audio fills the room where the Design Thing takes place.

Mr Nashman is letting us know that the Venice we are living in is now experiencing a flooding, as it in reality actually is doing while we are in the calm, and for once, non-windy Malmö. The video of sunny Venice is now changed to footage from news channels with pictures of streets under water, and a timeline of events is being presented.

At 8:26 AM rising water levels are forcing generators to cut off. The city's power goes out, along with wi-fi networks. 11:06 AM, the water levels have caused the majority of food to be damaged. 2 PM, as the water gains power, street signs are being swept away.

We are then divided into three groups, and each of the groups gets one of the dilemmas to come up with solutions for, for the next five minutes. The room is being filled with discussions from all of the groups, and five minutes pass by really quickly.

Then there is sharing time, and a lot of funny, interesting, and really smart ideas about how to solve the problems we "are facing" are being presented. Mina Legnered, the visual facilitator, is making sure those ideas are captured by Live Scribing i.e. drawing the highlights that are being presented on a big sheet of paper mounted on the wall that everyone can glance at.

After the sharings on the situation in Venice, we're shown a picture of Malmö that is clearly in another state than Venice, both in reality and the Venice that we "are in". Blue skies, sunny facades, and a Turning Torso that shines much brighter than it is at the day of the Design Thing is covering the wall.

We are being told that our loved ones are in Malmö, at the same time as a small trolley is being rolled in and placed in front of us by one of the members of the group, Alison Thomas. The match boxes, metaphorically containing our loved ones, are on a grass covered ground in a transparent box, with the Malmö silhouette behind. Underneath the ground where the boxes lay there is shimmering water, and it increases when Alison is pouring another litre of water into the box. We are now being told that Malmö is facing threats of flooding, and that it now is our responsibility to come up with preemptive solutions for our loved ones in Malmö.

The groups goes into another five minutes of solutioning, which feels even quicker this time, and the following sharing is influenced by what had been presented by the groups from the previous sharing session, but with a twist.

I do believe that since we just suddenly had been coming up with solutions for the urgency we were facing in Venice, we all were a lot more creative with the preemptive solutioning than if we had not had that experience.

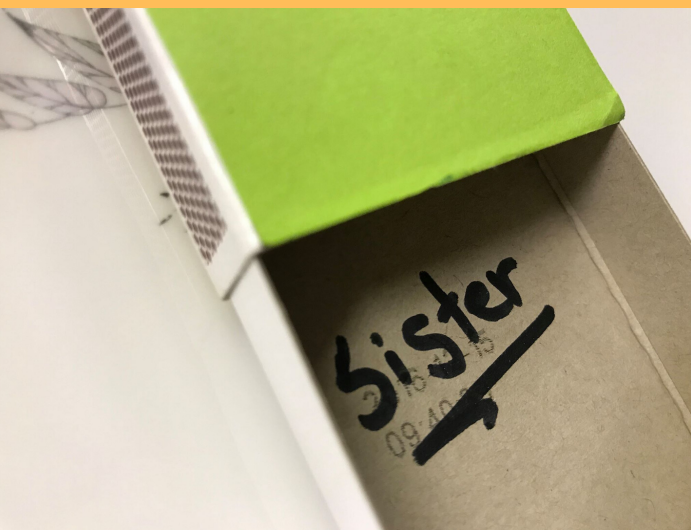
The Thing then goes into the debrief part, facilitated by Hershel, with a lot of interesting and vibrant discussions about crisis preparedness, and the issue of non-urgency. Mina is focusing on visually capturing the outcomes of the discussion and also takes 2 minutes towards the end to summarise the session through the visuals created live.

The discussion climate was a delight to experience this day, as it seemed like all of the participants were uninhibited in speaking their minds. The sense of a non-hierarchy conversation between 25 plus people was something I really take with me from this experience.

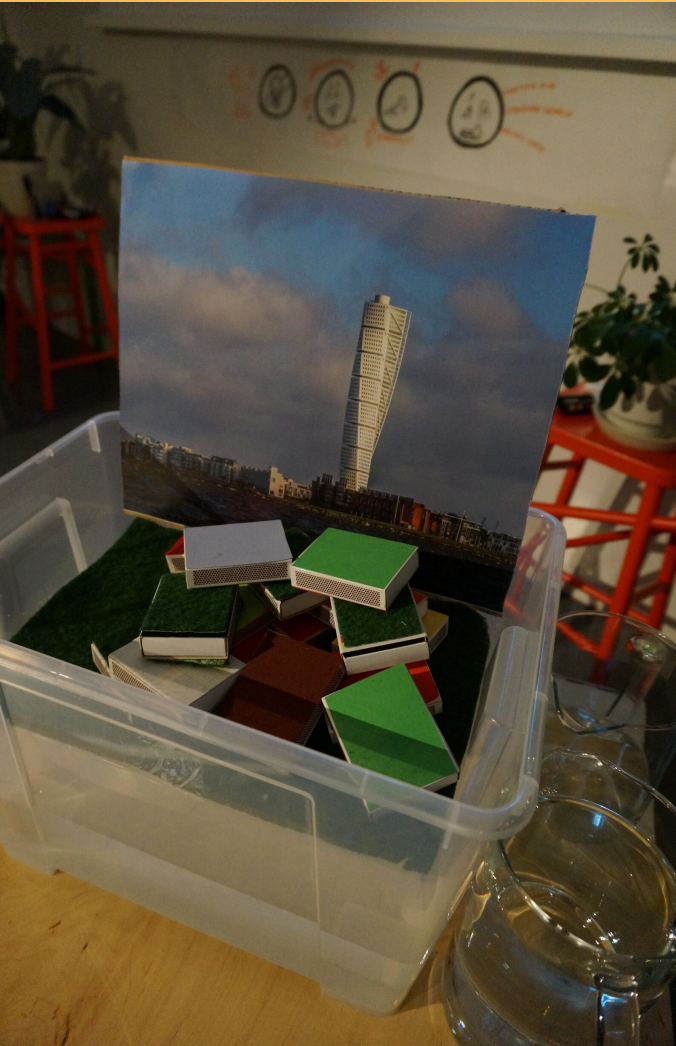
While speaking of take aways - the whole Design Thing ended with us getting the match boxes of our loved ones back that we could bring with us, and we even got to fill them with matches that we could pick from a glass bowl. However, there was a catch with the matches, a sort of contract we had to enter. Hjalmar Wallin, the fourth member of the group, told us that they saw this Design Thing as a conversation starter, and that we were free to take as many matches as the amount of conversations we would have with people about what we had experienced during this Thing, about crisis and preparedness. I won't tell you how many matches I took, but I just lit my first one before sitting down to write this review of this group's Design Thing. This is my first conversation starter about this theme, and I have a question for you who read this - how many matches would you have taken?



FROM VENICE



TO MALMÖ FLOODING



INTENSE & CREATIVE GROUP WORK



VISUAL FACILITATION TO CAPTURE



AND SUMMARISE GROUP IDEAS VISUALLY





Time for reflection

By involving both human and non-human components of the problem in the Design Thing, we were able to collaboratively design in a way that could potentially scale up to world-wide participation which was an eye-opening experience to me.



Looking back

After the design thing we were able to catch up with the group to talk to them about how they felt about how it went and gain some insights. During live interaction a lot can change on the fly. Even with planning, things change in real time and we were curious to learn if they had any surprises and of course learn if they would have changed anything.

DID YOU FEEL YOU SPARKED DISCUSSION AS YOU'D EXPECTED?

- I think we really managed to get the participants into the game plan and thinking in the realm of our concept. There were vibrant discussions both during the sharing times, as well as after the Design Thing, says Hershel. During the sharing times all of the three groups shared really playful and interesting ideas about solutions for their different tasks. I think that putting people through an interactive activity and getting them to share with the group throughout the process led to more openness in the discussion phase.
- And it felt free-flowing with little need for moderating interference, Mina adds.

WHAT WENT ACCORDING TO PLAN AND WHAT DIDN'T?

- To me, it felt like most of what we had planned went accordingly, except for the time frame that we had planned for discussions, tells Hershel. We were unsure how much the participants would engage and decided to hold the time for discussions quite short. The participant group surprised us by being very engaged and eager to ideate, present their findings and take part in a bigger group discussion.
- It all went better than expected, except for one change of slide in the PPT presentation, and that the computer logged out during the debrief. It did not affect the Design Thing though. I was also surprised that it all went so smooth and that the participants really engaged so well with the tasks, Hjalmar says proudly.

IT SEEMS IT WENT REALLY WELL FOR YOU GUYS. IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO TWEAK?

- I would like to involve more tangible materials and dare to create urgency with material means more than digital means, Alison shares. Our use of lighting and sound could have been more extensive while the use of powerpoint slides could have been minimized. The slides were helpful to illustrate the course of events in Venice but the first parts before and between the ideation sessions felt a bit too much like a presentation. There could have been more participant involvement from the start and all the way through our Design Thing.





Thank you

Thanks to our readers for following our quest to better understand CoDesign and the Design Thing concept. We're grateful to have mentors guiding us along the way and happy to meet various people with both knowledge and experience in the field. There is hope for our society to develop a more sustainable living and we are glad to contribute a piece to that puzzle.

And thank you to the CoDesign students who so kindly participated in this non-hierarchical interview.